

# Dixie Middle School 825 South 100 East St. George, Utah 84770

**April 2-3, 2008** 



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

## THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

## **Dixie Middle School**

**825 South 100 East St. George, UT 84770** 

**April 2-3, 2008** 

#### **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 2-3, 2008, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Dixie Middle School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Jim McKim is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Dixie Middle School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Dixie Middle School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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	Technology Director

## DIXIE MIDDLE SCHOOL

### ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

## **School Administration**

	Principal Assistant Principal		
Counseling			
Suzanne Reading	Counselor		
Tom Packer	Counselor		
Robin Keith			

## **Support Staff**

Leonard Hartley	Melissa Reynolds
Wendy Heaps	Ann Roberts
Dave Lambert	Gage Schimbeck
Allen Lister	Judi Schofield
Dixie Lister	K. D. Schwiermann
Gary Mayette	Deborah Simpson
Lisa Morgan	Marianne Skousen
Pam Munsterman	Luella Snyder
Naunie Nelson	Connie Ullrich
Shanin Phillips	Sherri Wells
Kay Pierce	
	Wendy Heaps Dave Lambert Allen Lister Dixie Lister Gary Mayette Lisa Morgan Pam Munsterman Naunie Nelson Shanin Phillips

## **Faculty**

Ashley Allen	Karen Ginocchio	Jill Pace
Larry Andersen	Richard Goodrich	Laura Pace
Matt Bassett	Terry Gough	Mike Paxman
Reagan Bastian	Jeremiah Greene	Robert Proffit
Barry Bishop	Mike Grisenti	Joe Randall
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Kris Cunningham	Justin Keate	Will Stucki
MaryAnn Daly	Robin Keith	Teresa Turner
Dustin Drake	Karen Kurtz	Jeff Williams
Paul Durrant	Terri Lusk	Conn Wood
Becky Ellison	Lisa Mitchell	

#### DIXIE MIDDLE SCHOOL

#### MISSION STATEMENT

**EAGLES SOAR** 

Learning and exploring
Together
We reach new heights
In knowledge, responsibility,
Character and self-worth.

#### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

Our Beliefs about Students and Education –

- Quality education enhances life
- Unique differences enhance learning
- Accept responsibility/consequences for their actions
- Learning with a positive attitude leads to lifelong learning
- In creating equality, excellence should not suppressed
- The school community encourages achievement
- Yearns to be treated with dignity and respect and has that right
- Where learning is critical to success
- Is a partnership
- Needs to provide skills in order to adapt to future changes
- Safe/comfortable environments are conducive to learning

#### **Work Ethics**

Arrive on time, be ready to go to work.

Come prepared with all necessary materials including your planner.

Turn in clean, legible assignments on time.

Avoid disrupting the teaching and learning environment.

Be respectful of others.

Follow teacher instructions and obey classroom rules.

#### **DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)**

#### 1. Thinking and Reasoning

- Acquires, organizes, and evaluates information to make informed decisions.
- Integrates new learning with existing knowledge and experiences.
- Applies multiple strategies to solve a variety of problems.
- Generates new and creative ideas in a variety of problems.

#### 2. Character

- Identifies personal goals, organizes and maintains information, monitors progress, and engages in self-assessment.
- Identifies one's own strengths and weaknesses.
- Demonstrates leadership attributes.
- Exhibits empathy and self-discipline.
- Demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy, and politeness.
- Uses the process of self-reflection to facilitate personal growth.
- Demonstrates honesty, courage, integrity, kindness, morality, and respect.

#### 3. Communication

- Selects, plans, and organizes ideas to communicate.
- Communicates with clarity, purpose, and understanding of audience.
- Actively listens, responds appropriately, and acknowledges the ideas of others.
- Integrates and uses a variety of communication forms and skills.
- Communicates using technology with developmentally appropriate and accurate terminology.
- Understands the implications/consequences and the ethical uses of technology.
- Recognizes, analyzes, and evaluates various forms of communication.

Date of visit: April 2-3, 2008

#### MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Verneita R. Hunt, Crestview School, Granite School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Georgia Loutensock, Utah State Office of Education

Krissy Beecher, North Davis Junior High School, Davis School District

Trisha Udy, North Davis Junior High School, Davis School District

Chuck Brandt, Canyon View High School, Iron School District

Rodney Shaw, Fort Herriman Middle School, Jordan School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

#### **DIXIE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

Dixie Middle School is located in the heart of St. George, Utah and serves almost 800 students in grades eight and nine. Dixie Middle School is the oldest physical plant in Washington School District. The school has seen many changes in its 32-year history, as the demographics of St. George and Washington County have changed as a result of dramatic increases in population. Washington County is the second-fastest-growing county in the United States, according to census data. Over the years, Dixie Middle School has seen a gradual decline in enrollment. The latest change to Dixie Middle School has been an 11 percent decrease in the school population due to recent boundary changes and the opening of a new middle school.

The ethnic population of the school mirrors that of the community, and is 80 percent Caucasian, 13 percent Hispanic, three percent Pacific Islander, three percent American Indian, two percent black, and one percent Asian. Most students live within walking distance of Dixie Middle School; however, students are also bused from surrounding towns and outlying areas. The number of students classified as having limited English proficiency has increased from seven percent in 2006-2007 to nine percent in 2007-2008. The special education program at Dixie Middle School represents 10 percent of the student population, a trend that has been fairly consistent over the years. In the current school year, 2007-2008, 41 percent of the students enrolled at Dixie Middle School qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, an increase from 29 percent the previous year.

- a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?
  - The Visiting Team found the profile to be valuable when looking at Dixie Middle School's progress since the first visit; it includes the focus group reports, detailed CSIP, departmental analyses, and articulated action plan outlining the school's progress.
- b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team suggests that Dixie Middle School add data charts to the profile that disaggregate data according to AYP subcategories. Achievement data should show which subgroups need more help with academic support. By looking more closely at subgroups, Dixie Middle School will be able to support students not succeeding in core subjects. Concise explanations should accompany all charts.

It is also suggested a concise list of teachers with education, endorsements, overall years taught, and years at Dixie Middle School be included.

c) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The Visiting Team found that the school profile was accurate in portraying the school's strengths and weaknesses. The team found—through observation, interviews, and further investigation—that Dixie Middle School has accomplished much since the last accreditation visit.

#### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

The Visiting Team found that Dixie Middle School is well aware of the need to identify who and who is not learning. As teachers identify which students are at risk in core subjects, they should collaborate to understand the reasons behind student failure. Then teachers and administrators can collaborate how to improve student learning.

## CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

#### Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

a) To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?

It is the finding of the Visiting Team that Dixie Middle School has immersed itself in a collaborative process to develop, revise, and define a mission statement, belief statements, and DRSLs to support student achievement. The mission statement and belief statements were originally written in 2001 and have been revisited by the entire faculty in a collaborative process. The mission statement and beliefs statements are closely aligned and emphasize student learning and progress.

b) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?

The Visiting Team found that the mission statement and belief statements embed the life skills of thinking and reasoning, character and communication identified by the Dixie Middle School staff. The life skills established and adopted by Dixie Middle School were driven by the school's embedded and institutionalized beliefs.

c) Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.

It is the finding of the Visiting Team that Dixie Middle School has developed indicators to assess the life skills adopted by the school community. Evidence of progress for both indicators and life skills have also been adopted by the staff to allow for extensive review of where the school is, where it is going, and how it is going to get there.

d) To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school, and appear evident in the culture of the school?

The Visiting Team found that the mission, beliefs, and life skills are evident in many of school's polices and decisions, and are embedded in the culture of the school. Belief statements and life skills are evident in academic and curricular decisions that foster improved student learning.

#### **Curriculum:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success?

The development of Professional Learning Communities has provided the staff at Dixie Middle School with the opportunity to work collaboratively on a regular basis to create and implement curriculum based on clearly defined standards each community creates through common assessments. Departments are able to ensure that the curriculum is based on the Utah Core Curriculum by creating pre- and post-assessments on UTIPS. The DRSLs are entirely based on the *Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success.* The ASPIRE program, in which all students participate directly, teaches character development based on the indicators from the Utah Life Skills.

b) To what extent does the curriculum engage **all** students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills?

The Visiting Team observed evidence that teachers at Dixie Middle School are collaborating in researching and implementing "best practices." This collaboration has spurred the development of a curriculum that actively engages all students in a variety of learning activities that encourage the development of inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills.

c) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's DRSLs?

The Visiting Team observed activities and lessons in the classrooms that were based on the DRSLs, and it is evident that teachers use the DRSLs in planning the curriculum. The Professional Learning Communities provide the opportunity for the staff to work collaboratively to create such curriculum. The ASPIRE class directly teaches the Character Development DRSL.

It is recommended that the staff directly explain to the students how the lessons apply to the DRSLs so that students become more aware of the language of the DRSLs, why they are learning specific skills, and how the assignments they are doing apply to life skills.

d) How does the staff use assessments to drive curriculum to ensure that **all** students can reach the intended learning outcomes?

The staff members at Dixie Middle School have worked diligently through their Professional Learning Communities to create common assessments—both preand post-assessments. The Visiting Team observed that teachers were using the results of the common assessments to initially teach and also reteach a curriculum based on the Utah State Core.

#### **Instruction:**

*To what extent do teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning?* 

Individual teachers use a wide variety of learning experiences to enhance student learning. The Visiting Team observed direct instruction, classroom discussion that included open-ended questions, demonstrations, hands-on activities and manipulatives, student presentations, student portfolios, group work, total physical response, journal writing, peer tutoring, peer collaboration and review, and metacognition.

b) To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?

The Character Life Skill is addressed daily through the ASPIRE program. Also, the Visiting Team observed that the DRSLs are imbedded into daily instruction. However, the students may not be aware of which DRSLs are being taught. Therefore, the Visiting Team recommends that the teachers refer to the DRSLs within daily lessons.

c) To what extent is the school's professional development program guided by identified instructional needs, and how does it provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning?

Dixie Middle School's professional development program currently focuses on Professional Learning Communities and Understanding by Design. Teachers develop and improve their instructional strategies through departmental and school-wide collaboration. Learning walks allow teachers and staff members the opportunity to observe and evaluate teaching within the school.

d) To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?

The Visiting Team observed that the teachers at Dixie Middle School "rock," and are doing exactly what they should be doing in their classrooms. The average number of years of experience among these certified professionals is 13. Examples of best practices in teaching were observed throughout the school. Teachers reflect, both individually and collaboratively, on teaching practices.

e) To what extent does the school effectively implement a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction, and assessments?

Technology has been integrated into curriculum and instruction. Students create PowerPoint presentations, research online, present DMS news, create the yearbook online, make video public service announcements, and create essays and reports. Some teachers utilize camera, video, and computers with their classroom projectors during learning activities. Teachers also utilize audio enhancement equipment and use technology for assessment. For example, departments test using UTIPS or other online testing. Also, the math and special education departments design individualized student assessment graphs.

#### **Assessment:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments with performance standards based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

The Visiting Team observed that departments have common assessments based on Power Standards and the Utah State Core Curriculum. Common assessments are given and evaluated often for individual student achievement. The school is moving toward further intervention and remediation based on the results of the assessments.

b) To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?

The faculty at Dixie Middle School is using a variety of assessment tools. Data coaches are being trained to implement more school-wide assessment for individual students. State and national test are being implemented. Goals have been set to increase scores on State Skills exams.

c) To what extent does the professional staff use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its academic expectations?

Departments are using online assessment programs that allow faculty members to compare and contrast student achievement. Parents and students can utilize the information gathered in these assessments to determine the students' individual needs. Evidence was shown that not enough is being done to evaluate assessments, and the school has designated Data Coaches to gather and disseminate more information. The Visiting Team encourages Dixie Middle School to continue in this path and use data more effectively to asses its success in meeting academic expectations.

d) To what extent does the school's professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?

Dixie Middle School has adopted and begun to institutionalize the Professional Learning Communities, a process that requires collaboration. It was observed by the Visiting Team that the faculty uses projects, portfolios, essays, benchmarks, U-TIPS, peer assessments, self-assessments, rubrics, and selected response tests in assessing students.

e) To what extent is there organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSL?

The Visiting Team observed that improvements in this area may not yet be in place. It is suggested that the staff members use some of their collaboration time and curriculum mapping to identify where the DRSLs fit in their lessons and curriculum. Faculty members should identify and articulate the DRSLs to the students in the teaching.

#### **CHAPTER 3: NAAS SUPPORT STANDARDS**

#### **Leadership and Organization:**

- a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?
  - The school leadership promotes quality instruction by giving teachers and staff members opportunities for a variety of professional development opportunities, such as attending conferences that address their content areas, instructional strategies, assessments, etc. Dixie Middle School has instituted and is working with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within departments.
- b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?
  - Dixie Middle School employs decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness. Individual teachers and departments use common evaluations, and in some departments align and coordinate the curriculum department-wide. A staff member is designated as a "data coach" to collect, analyze and disseminate data to teachers. The school keeps abreast of demographic changes as they affect the school population.
- c) To what extent does the leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?
  - The leadership has established a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment at Dixie Middle School. The old physical plant does not lend itself to technology and collaboration. Department classrooms are not always in close proximity. Despite the age of the facility, the school uses its resources to support its goals, DRSLs, and student achievement.
- d) To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?
  - The administration of Dixie Middle School has established a culture that empowers the entire school community. The school staff demonstrates commitment, participation, and shared responsibility for student learning in a variety of roles in the decision-making process. Department chairs are rotated on

a yearly basis; focus group leaders and members include staff members, parents, and students.

Working within the PLCs has given staff members the opportunity to share responsibility for student learning by developing common assessments and coordinating curricula. Departments are at various stages of implementation of the PLCs.

e) To what extent has the school established a formal system through which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?

Each teacher has a daily fifteen-minute ASPIRE class of no more than 22 students. The counseling staff has developed a number of character education lessons that are presented by all teachers on the same day. Twice weekly, student-produced "news" is shown on the school's closed TV system during this period. ASPIRE teachers mentor student progress, grades, etc. Student SEOPs are conducted with the ASPIRE teacher.

#### CHAPTER 4: NAAS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD

#### **Culture of Continual Improvement:**

a) To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using Collaborating for Student Achievement, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process, that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?

The Dixie Middle School faculty and staff have worked to implement the Understanding by Design (UbD) program to further the educational environment. The administration has also seen the Professional Learning Environment strategies as a way to further enforce Understanding by Design. The Visiting Team observed teachers using the UbD program in their classrooms. The faculty and staff meet once a week on Tuesdays for an hour to collaborate and discuss student needs. The faculty tries to identify student groups and areas that need help, then devise plans to assist those students in becoming successful in education.

b) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through an aligned and ongoing professional development plan focused on the school's goals for improvement?

Dixie Middle school faculty and staff have been given many opportunities for professional development. The school has chosen PLC as a focus for the school's continued improvement. The Visiting Team observed that there is a professional development faculty member who mentors new teachers and works closely with the assistant principal to create and implement faculty-wide professional development. The school has also sent many faculty members to the Professional Learning Communities trainings, and has focused on getting entire departments trained.

c) To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

The faculty member responsible for this focus area has created a program called "learning walk-through" that has allowed the entire faculty to evaluate and improve through peer evaluations and input. The Visiting Team observed that the faculty has bought into this program and the action plan by supporting the administration in its decisions and programs. The focus for this faculty is on how students learn and whether learning is taking place.

*d)* To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The Visiting Team observed that the administration of Dixie Middle School is working to provide support for continuous improvement by implanting and training staff members in DuFour's Professional Learning Communities and the Understanding by Design concepts. The faculty and staff feel that the administration is willing to accept new ideas and input to the productive change of the school.

e) What significant progress has been made in implementing the original action plan since the last full visit?

The Visiting Team has observed that the original action plan has been addressed, and that—through focus groups and PLC—it that continues to evolve with the needs of the school.

f) What significant progress has the school made in addressing the **major** recommendations of the previous Visiting Team and/or review team?

With regard to the first recommendation—to increase collaboration time—the school created early-out time on Fridays, which was discontinued at the discretion of the district because of busing concerns. This has caused frustration for the teachers, but they now meet once a week after school and put those hours toward quality teaching.

The second recommendation was for implementation of school-wide assessments. With the implementation of Professional Learning Communities and Data

Coaches, the school is creating more school-wide assessment structures. This is allowing better placement of students in classes and programs.

The third recommendation was for a positive public relations campaign. The school is now using the local newspaper to promote student achievements and has instituted an end-of-year awards program in which parents and the community are involved.

#### **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

It is the finding of the Visiting Team that Dixie Middle is making great progress in establishing, building, and maintaining positive working relationships among the faculty and staff of the school. The establishment of Professional Learning Communities, UbD principles, and learning walk-through help to promote and sustain better collegiality among the staff at Dixie Middle School.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

It was evident to the Visiting Team that the school is making great efforts to further establish and maintain a culture of collaboration to support student learning. The Visiting Team found departments that had created common assessments, both formative and summative, and the work being done with UbD put student outcomes and leaning at the focus of much of what is being taught. It was evident to the Visiting Team that departments were working closely together, but the school should continue to explore collaborative network in cross-curricular subjects.

c) To what extent has the school engaged the school community in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

It is the finding of the Visiting Team that departmental analyses and the work of the focus groups have been ongoing processes of self-study, and that both the departments and the focus groups have sufficiently identified and addressed their areas of strength and weakness to further promote student learning.

d) How are results of school improvement identified, documented, used, and communicated to **all** stakeholders?

The Visiting Team found that the school has analyzed its data and identified areas of concern that need to be addressed. The CSIP report submitted by the school identifies the areas of greatest concern for the school to address. The identification of these areas and the goals for improvement are communicated to the faculty and parents through PTSA and School Community Council. The school's progress is reviewed annually by the stakeholders, and school improvement needs are again addressed and identified.

## CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

#### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends Principal Jim McKim and Assistant Principal Mitchell Six for creating an atmosphere of trust, friendship, creativity, professionalism, and excellence for teachers, students, and the community of Dixie Middle School. Only through such an environment are teachers empowered with a focus on student learning and free to promote a culture of positive achievement and self-improvement.
- The Visiting Team commends the teachers and staff of Dixie Middle School for the tremendous work they do each day with students. This includes the varied use of technology, many hands-on instructional strategies, engagement of students in concrete learning activities, and making education fun. Students comment on how much they like and trust the teachers, feeling that teachers are willing to help students with academic and a variety of other problems. According to the students and staff, it's the people there that make Dixie Middle School so great.
- The Visiting Team commends the teachers for creating a climate of passionate collegiality. Teachers share curricula, instructional strategies, teaching materials, and general professional information. By doing so, teachers have embedded a climate of safety, trust, and friendship with each other, the administration, and the students. In addition, the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) that have been established are moving forward and achieving powerful results; however, it is understood that those results take time to become evident.

#### **Recommendations:**

• The Visiting Team recommends that the administration and teachers of Dixie Middle School continue working with student achievement data, disaggregating who is and is not learning core concepts. Research shows that as teachers use common assessments, benchmark assessments, and formal and informal tests to

assess core concepts, student achievement increases over time. Continuing the Professional Learning Communities will help this process greatly as teachers collaborate within and across academic subject areas. It is recommended that this process continue permeating the school community.

• It is recommended that Dixie Middle School continue promoting Professional Learning Communities as a method of communicating data, research-based best practices, teaching strategies, and professional development topics. It is also recommended that the school explore and establish more intervention programs that will increase student success. PLCs should be used to communicate within and across departments, with the main focus being student learning and achievement.